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ON PAGE A-7

WASHINGTON POST
18 February 1985

Price May Be on DEA Chief's Head

Colombian Drug Traffickers Reportedly Seek Kidnapping

By Barton Reppert
Associated Press

Colombian narcotics traffickers are believed to have offered up to \$350,000 for the kidnapping of Drug Enforcement Administration chief Francis M. Mullen, or another high-ranking DEA official, a spokesman for the agency said yesterday.

"This threat is being taken very seriously," said spokesman Robert Feldkamp.

He said concern over the top-level kidnap threat—as well as continuing efforts to find a DEA agent abducted in Guadalajara, Mexico—had prompted DEA to request intensified Customs Service searches along the U.S.-Mexican border over the weekend.

A customs officer at Laredo, Tex., who refused to be identified,

told reporters there Saturday that authorities were seeking Colombian terrorists.

[White House spokesman Larry Speakes told reporters aboard Air Force One as President Reagan returned from his vacation yesterday that the United States and Mexico have been "in close and frequent touch" over the case of the missing drug agent.]

Speakes said the contacts were at the "working and highest levels," but would not elaborate.]

Feldkamp was asked about a report yesterday in Newsweek magazine, which quoted intelligence sources as saying Colombian "drug lords" were seeking to have Mullen kidnapped and exchanged for six accused Colombian drug traffickers in custody in the United States and Spain.

"Based on intelligence that DEA

has received coming out of Colombia, we have reason to believe that the traffickers have put a price tag possibly as high as \$350,000 on the head of the DEA administrator or another high DEA official," Feldkamp said.

But the DEA spokesman described as "just speculative" the reported connection with plans to trade the prospective kidnap victim for release of the six drug traffickers.

"We had already taken extra precautionary measures when the first threats began coming out in early January, and we have done some other things that I cannot characterize," Feldkamp said.

The State Department recently warned that Americans in Colombia should take "utmost care" because of the increased possibility of violence.